MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (PROF. SAIFUDDIN SOZ): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) According to the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, Nagpur, a low-cost, non-noble metal based oxidative catalytic converter for auto-exhaust emission control has been developed. The catalyst has undergone a limited test for conversion efficiency at the Vehicle Research Development Establishment, Ahmadnagar. Detailed trials on durability of the converter have not been carried out.

(c) The Government is implementing a major plan of action for introduction of tighter emission norms for all categories of vehicles, introduction of unleaded petrol and catalytic converter fitted vehicles, and introduction of low-sulphur diesel for cleaner diesel vehicles, in a phased manner. Tighter emission norms for new vehicles were introduced on 1.4.1996, and is to be made stricter with effect from 1.4.2000. The Government is implementing a major programme for introduction of unleaded petrol and catalytic converter fitted vehicles in the country. In the first phase effective from 1.4.1995, unleaded petrol was introduced in the four cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai for new four wheeler petrol vehicles registered in these cities from this date. It is planned to cover about 40 major cities and towns in the next phase, effective from 31.12.1998. Unleaded petrol is to be supplied in the entire country with effect from 1.4.2000. A similar programme for introduction of low-sulphur diesel is under implementation. Low-sulphur diesel (0.5%) has been introduced in the cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai with effect from 1.4.1996. Diesel with 0.25% sulphur is to introduced in the entire country with effect from 1.4.1999.

Problem of villagers living within Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve

1130. DR. D. VENKATESHWAR RAO: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the villagers living within the Nanda Devi Biosphere reserve are agitating for opening its core zone to them;

(b) if so, since when the villagers access to the Biosphere reserve was stopped

(c) whether poachers and hunters now operate without any check in the reserve area; and

(d) if so, the reasons why assistance of villagers is not taken to protect the biosphere as was being done in the past?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (PROF. SAIFUDDIN SOZ): (a) The State Government of Uttar Pradesh has reported that from time to time they have received letters and representations from the local people to open the core zone area for tourism and trekking.

(b) Any entry into the core zone of the Biosphere Reserve has been prohibited since 18.2.1983.

(c) No Sir. The State Government has reported that regular patrolling of the area is done by the staff employed for the purpose who keep a strict watch and control on any poaching and hunting.

(d) Does not arise. However, eco-developmcnt activities in the buffer zone arc undertaken with the cooperation and involvement of the local people.

Biosphere Reserves

1131. SHRIMATI JAYANTI PATNAIK: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of potential sites . identified as on 31st March, 1997 for